

Text: Ephesians 4.17-32  
St Stephen's

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Sat/Sun

## Where Truth Meets Life

Dallas Willard opens his remarkable book, "*Renovation of the Heart*"... with a tragic story. An Air Force Fighter pilot was practicing high speed low altitude maneuvers, and turned the controls to make a sharp climb – and flew right into the ground.

The **pilot had been flying upside down** and at the time of the climbing maneuver, didn't even know it...

**A lot of us are like that.** We move at high speed and have lost any framework to help us tell up from down, right from wrong. Crashes are inevitable.

Thawed as it is the heritage of the worldview known as "**Post Modernism**", a movement that believes all truth is ultimately **relative** and subjective. Post-moderns believe that all truths have equal claim and all cultures have equal value. There are no universal standards of justice, only interest groups competing for power. So your truth is every bit as important as mine.

The **Bible** has a very different perspective on truth, that **truth is rooted in God**, and in the way he has created us and the world around us. That truth is clear and absolute and unchanging. The bible says this is so because **God is true**...

*God is not a man, that he should lie...*

Num 23:19

This issue about truth is important in your life, because when your **convictions are out of sync** with the way the world really is, the way God really is, and out of sync with his purposes for your life, you can **fly your plane right into the ground**. That is true of the history of the nations. It is true of **family** life. That is true of **individual** lives like ours. That is why the Bible **warns against lies** all the time. **Lives built on lies crash.**

We are **finishing a series** this weekend on the importance of fellowship in our lives. **Fellowship** is one of the **five purposes** of our church.

Over these weeks we have been talking about how it was always **Jesus' habit to gather his followers together** in fellowship, about how these family circles are **places we can experience God's love** and his presence and last week Bill talked about how the new believers in Acts were **gathered by the Holy Spirit** into circles where they shared their faith and their lives together and they were **in awe** of what God was doing.

Today I want to talk to you about how these fellowship groups can be **places 'where truth meets life'**.

We are looking at **Eph 4.17-19** Paul is saying there that...

*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.*

Eph 4:17 (NIV)

**Why is Paul so urgent** about this?

When Paul compares the **Jewish and Gentile worlds**, one of the outstanding differences is the **place of truth** in those two cultures. What made the Jews different from all the other nations of the world was they had the scriptures. They had the **words** of God and the **truth** of God and the **promises** of God. And Paul knew this made a critical difference in life.

In three short verses he tracks...

**The Downward Spiral of Life without Truth** Let's look at it.

### **1. Closed Minds and Hardened Hearts**

*...because they have closed their minds and hardened their*

*hearts against him.*

Eph 4:18 (NLT)

The word for hardened means their hearts became like **marble**, like rock. And Paul says they did this **intentionally**, implying they did so because they didn't want to live their lives for God. They **wanted to live for themselves**. So They hardened their lives against God.

## 2. **Darkness and Ignorance Take Over**

*you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking... darkened in their understanding... the ignorance that is in them...*

Eph 4:17-18 (NIV)

**Robert Coles, prof at Harvard University**, some time ago published a piece on **the connection of intellect to character**. In his article, he tells the story of a female student who took his classes on ethical development - who came from a mid-western working class community and was earning her way through college - cleaning rooms among other things. The male students whose rooms she cleaned were rude and often crude to her, partly because of her lower economic background, partly because she was cleaning their rooms, and partly - just because.

One of them **propositioned her frequently** as she went about her work. What confused and infuriated her was she was in **a class on ethics** with this same student, who was the **best student** in the class at arguably the most prestigious university in the world.

The girl **left Harvard** because of all this, and professor Coles did an **exit interview** with her, and heard her whole story. She said to him, "*I've been taking all these phil courses... but how do you teach people to be good, and what's the point of knowing good if you don't try to become a good person?*" The professor seemed heartbroken at her questions. But never spoke to the student who propositioned her, and never

changed the way he taught his class. There were no questions on his tests on these matters.

Because **the class had no framework for ethical values**. Its discussions were built on the shared postmodern assumptions of the modern universities. There is **no absolute truth**. No right, no wrong. No God who creates and redeems and guides. **Just you and me set adrift** in this cosmic vat, our lives nothing more than random occurrences in a meaningless world, and somehow we have to make our own way. And life is **all about us**. So I can do whatever I want.

Anyone get the feeling we are flying upside down?

*the futility of their thinking... darkened in their understanding... the ignorance that is in them...*

And you can be the smartest student in the most prestigious university in the world... and be just like that.

### 3. Separated from the Life of God

*They are... separated from the life of God*

Eph 4:18 (NIV)

That becomes the tragic impact of the postmodern worldview. No grace. No rebirth. No forgiveness. No fellowship. No guidance. No promises. No Holy Spirit. No hope. Just life without God. It is a frightening phrase.

### 4. Letting Go and Let Go

*Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

Eph 4:19 (NIV)

No boundaries, no barriers, no restraint. Addiction. Anything goes. Nothing satisfies. **When you let go like this, God eventually lets you go**. And then you are **gone**. Heading straight into the ground at high speed, and you didn't even

know you were flying upside down.

It is the power of truth to break this cycle.

## **The Upward Spiral of Truth Transforming Life (Eph 4.20-32)**

*But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,*

Eph 4:20-21 (NASB)

Paul reminds us that we have gone to **a different college**, a different school, no matter what our university. BTW, this is the **best university** in the world, because in this school we have **learned truth**. With three short phrases he sums up the **curriculum** and the **faculty** and the **spirit** of this university.

Let's follow the verbs in these verses... Paul says,

- **You Learned Christ** He is the **core curriculum**. His eternal pre-existence, his miraculous entry into this world, his life, his deeds, his words, his wisdom, his death, his resurrection, his promises, his power, his present rule, his promised return, his indwelling presence, his kingdom – all leading to **his surpassing call** upon your life. **Because we learned Christ, we live for Christ!**
- **You Heard Christ** It is he whose voice is heard when you study the bible and listen to your pastors and teachers as they teach the bible.
- **You Were Taught in Christ** What does that mean? It means that his school is not a modern university where there are no values except the supremacy of the self. Rather his school is a place where trust and surrender and obedience and dependence the life of faith and partnership with him are all part of the curriculum. It's not about you. It's all about him.

Then Paul sums it all up with this wonderful phrase-

- **Truth is in Christ!**

If you want to find out the truth about life and your life and God and this world, come to Jesus. Listen to Jesus, trust Jesus, follow Jesus.

**What difference** will that make? In his school, you will learn that...

**New Life brings New Thinking and New Living**

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self... to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Eph 4:21-24 (NIV)

This is another way of saying that His **truth has a purpose**. It is meant to **bring you to life** in Jesus, keep you in that life, build you up in that life. It teaches you to fly rightside up. You will learn up from down, right from wrong. Jesus will change how you think – you begin to think like he thinks. This is a teacher who will change your **mind** and change your **heart**, and **then** you find you can actually change your **behavior**, taking off old habits and clothes and putting on new ones. You become different, from the inside out, and you change – you just know you can let those old habits drop away, like leaves falling from a tree in the fall.

**Where can you find one of these classrooms? In Our Fellowship**

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

Eph 4:25 (NIV)

**Circle** 'to his neighbor', 'all members of one body'

It happens best in a **small group bible study** where you can

share your lives, study his truth, and encourage each other as you live it out. Look at the **graphic** on your handout...

I have found over the years that most groups tend to become what you might call "Truth Focused" or alternatively, "Life Focused". Those groups each do something good, but when you put Christ in the middle of your group, you can do even **something better**...

### Your Small Group can be a place where 'Truth Meets Life'

<b>Truth-Focused Groups</b>	<b>Life-Focused Groups</b>	<b>Transformation-Focused Groups</b>
Know the answers to the questions	Know the answers to personal problems	Know and live the truth about God and me
Focus on information – What does it mean?	Focus on introspection – How do I feel?	Focus on transformation – How am I becoming like Christ
Reward members for being right	Reward members for being real	Reward members for being honest with God and others
Community is built on agreement	Community is built on acceptance	Community is built on authenticity
The goal is a well formed student	The goal is a well understood self	The goal is a well-ordered heart

I invite you to join one of our small group bible studies. Or come on Sunday mornings to the mid hour. Make sure you are in a place where "Truth meets life"